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ABSTRACT

Topics and guidelines for stimulating interest in the study of local history at the elementary and secondary levels are described. The paper lists roles and responsibilities of teachers and students engaged in historical research, suggests projects for elementary and secondary teachers, and lists five basic reference books for teachers who are seeking additional information on local history projects. Motivation and skill development are discussed as essential preliminary tasks for the teacher in order to help students, who are improperly prepared to perform basic historical research, avoid frustration. It is recommended that elementary children do projects related to home and neighborhood, such as telling stories of family history connected with moving into the neighborhood, making scrapbooks of photos of the neighborhood, and visiting museums and public libraries to research simple themes. Secondary level students could study broader community issues such as poverty, pollution, and unusual local events. They could use community resources, such as local newspapers. Suggestions are given to help students choose appropriate topics, organize their project work and classroom presentations, and write final reports. (AV)

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Planning Local History Projects for Elementary and Secondary Students

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The use of local resources for the teaching of history allows the student to briefly experience the work of the researcher-scholar. Students at every grade level should be able to find signficant and worthwhile issues and events to pursue without traveling beyond the borders of their home community. Elementary and secondary students involved in researching the events that have influenced their families and their communities may, for instance, discover that national historical trends were often grass root phenomenon. Local resources can often yield opportunities for children to trace social, technical, and economic changes that have led to the current and familiar topics contained in today's news reports. Because local resources are easily accessible to students, local history projects can be carried out as routine events in most social studies classrooms. Schools and public libraries, museums, local history societies, and family records or family accounts of the past are usually within the reach of most students. This type of project can be of value to the student as he or she explores the heritage found within families and the community.

The topics and suggestions described in this paper were designed to stimulate interest in local history. The format of this article provides several basic guidelines and suggestions for both students and teachers. The paper is divided into four components which include: (1) a list of roles and responsibilities for teachers and students; (2) a list of suggested projects for elementary teachers; (3) a list of suggested projects for secondary teachers; and, (4) a list of basic reference books for teachers seeking additional information on local history projects.

I. Roles and Responsibilities for Teachers and Students

Elementary and secondary school children can learn how to execute basic historical research, provided they are given ample instruction in what is expected of them. The elementary child would benefit most by working on projects that relate to

home and neighborhood, while secondary students should be able to become more directly involved in thetypes of project that take them out in the community.

The teacher needs to know where and how to get students started. In order to prepare students for this type of project work, teachers should review the items listed under the subheading "Teacher's Role and Responsibilities." While these items are basic to the processes involved in training students, the teacher is encouraged to modify these items and develop other items that are more suitable for his/her particular situation. Theitems below (under the subheadings "Teacher's Roles and Responsibilites") suggest a division of labor between teachers and students as a procedural approach. This approach is aimed at avoiding many of the frustrations and pitfalls that await students who are improperly prepared to take on basic historical research.

Teacher's Roles and Responsibilities.

A. Motivation of Students - Because a history project often demands a great deal of student time and effort, students need to become committed to the execution of the project. While this type of commitment must ultimately come from the student, the teacher can influence this commitment through reward systems and allotting class time and effort to the launching of the project.

1.) Comprehensive lists of topics for student research - Teachers need to generate a rather comprehensive list of suggested topics which students could carry out at home, at school, or in the community. This will help to eliminate some of the frustration that students feel when first confronted with such projects. Students are encouraged to suggest additional

projects or ideas that they would like to pursue.

2.) Provide a comprehensive list of community resources - Teachers need to know what is available within their community. Community resources are usually outside resources and institutions that offer information on the community and its development. Included with these resources would be such common places as libraries, museums, local history societies, etc. A student handout with this information would be highly desirable and helpful to students.

3.) Displays of completed student projects - Students would benefit greatly from examples of other student's work. A discussion of what others had done, as well as a discussion of the pitfalls that others have fallen into while working on local history, would be most beneficial to students.

4.) Culmination activities for students - As part of the motivational aspect of working on a local history project, the students and teachers may discuss what will be done with the final product or completed project. Student displays, presentations to other classes, and presentations to parent groups would all help give additional incentive to the project work.

B. Skill Development - Perhaps the most important benefit that students will receive by working on local history projects, is their experience of being a researcher. The skills that they develop in project work may be applied to all other aspects of their school work and will even help them become more competent in the adult world.

1.) Understanding and using reference materials - Teachers will find that a history project is an ideal way to train students in the use of the library. Skills in this area include locating materials, differentiating reference materials from other sources, the use of periodicals, etc.

2.) Development of writing skills - Teachers need to prepare students for project work by developing a variety of writing skills. These would include: the techniques of outlining, writing paragraphs, notetaking, writing thesis statements, concluding and summarizing, and interpreting a variety of different types of information.

3.) Sequencing, checklisting, and development of series of deadlines - By teaching students how to organize their project work, students will learn how to order their priorities, sequence which steps should be completed first, and learn how to plan for deadlines. These skills would also transfer to all other types of course work and help them become more competent throughout life.

4.) Working with historical evidence - Students need training and experience in working with a variety of different types of historical evidence. Teachers need to train students in the differences and importance of various types of historical evidence. For instance, students need to understand the difference between primary and secondary sources.

5.) The Finished Product - Teachers need to train and instruct students in the form and quality of the final product. By establishing guidelines for the final report, students will be

able to turn out a product that meets minimal standards. In addition, the teacher needs to set some standard of quality for students. Examples of "good" project work, along with some other qualities of what should be included in an acceptable report, would help students get started.

The teacher's responsibility then includes the instructional training of students, the development of student skills, and the establishment of acceptable standards for the final report.

Student's Roles and Responsibilities

A. Choosing an Appropriate Topic - The first critical choice that the student makes is the choice of a topic. Problems arise when the student selects a topic for which there is not enough resource material.

1.) Selection of the research topic - Perhaps the best way for a student to select a topic is to identify five or more topics that could be researched for the project assignment. The next step would be to survey the sources of information on each of these topics to make sure that adequate material is available. As a result of this initial work the student should be better prepared to make the final choice of a research topic.

2.) Sources of information - Once the topic of the research project has been selected, the next step is to match the topic with the sources of information that are available in the community. Staff personnel, working in community resource centers, should be very helpful in directing the student to sources of topic information.

B. Getting Organized for Project Work - Before beginning the history project, the student needs to establish a

list of things to do and things that will be needed in order to carry out his responsibilities during the project work. Listed below are several items that may help the student get organized.

1.) Basic equipment - Besides notebooks, pencils and pens, the students will need to make a list of any special equipment that may help them gather information or prepare the final report. The requirements and form of the final report may help the students decide what special equipment may be needed. Tape recorders, cameras, and notecards, are some additional types of items that may be used by students.

2.) Organization of information by topics - Once the subject or topic of the report has been established, the student may find it helpful to organize the subtopics of the report into folders. If notecards are used, index notation labels and a carrying case, such as a file case, would help the student organize the information. Therefore, the student needs to consider how the information will be organized as it is gathered. Card files and folders are two basic ways to organize information.

3.) Establishing calendars and sequences - After students have decided on the topic of their report, they may find that a checklist of "things to do" organized around a series of calendar dates will help keep their work on schedule. Once the student has established a checklist of "things to do", ordering the list according to a logical sequence and recording the sequence on a calendar will also help.

4.) Scheduling appointments - Identifying potential resources that provide information on the

subject is next. This involves the making of arrangements so that work with their sources can begin. Library hours, appointments, calendars, etc., all need to be checked prior to going out in the community.

C. Organizing the Information for Classroom Presentation - Students need to know the requirements and specifications of the final report of their project work. Teachers may ask for oral reports or written reports. The form and structure of the final report will affect the data gathering process of the students. This section contains some general suggestions for students and teachers that may help establish a basic form that is acceptable to both teachers and students.

1.) The problem approach - One way to begin a history project is through the problem approach, in which the student identifies a problem or a question that will be solved or answered in the course of the project work. The problem or question may be answered directly as a result of the study, or the student may take a stand on the problem or question and defend that stand on the basis of the evidence that is uncovered.

2.) Outlining the topic - By outlining the subtopics of the research project, students will be able to begin to organize the information into a logical format. This should be especially helpful when it comes to writing the first draft or preparing an oral presentation.

3.) Gathering information - Students need to carefully note the sources of their information. Dates, places, titles, and/or names of persons interviewed must be indicated in order to avoid serious reporting errors.

4.) Verification of information - Single sources of information are inadequate and can prove to be untrustworthy. Students need to practice double-checking information whenever possible. Another account, another newspaper, or an additional book on the same subject, will help to build credibility into the study.

D. The Final Project Report - In writing the final report or preparing an oral presentation, the student is responsible for preparing a report that meets all the requirements. In addition, the student may use some discretion by making the report attractive and interesting. Pictures, charts, graphs, cartoons, attractive covers, and illustrations greatly improve the final report and help make issues clearer for others. A little extra effort on the part of students often makes the difference between an average and an outstanding report.

II. Suggested Projects for Elementary Teachers

Developing an interest in and an understanding of history begins in the elementary grades. Local history, including family heritage, can become important aspects of social studies programs for elementary teachers and students. The concept of time and the human events that created today's conditions are essential for the education of children if they are to deal with the future. While elementary children are not ready for extensive research tasks, they can begin the basic training that will lead to the skills necessary for more advanced work. In this section, suggestions are listed for elementary students according to their grade level. Listings include projects for kindgergarden, primary, and intermediate children. While these ideas are not inclusive, they may lead to other activities generated by the elementary teacher.

A. Kindergarden Projects - It is assumed that kindergarden children do not possess the basic reading and writing abilities usually associated with basic social studies skills. Nevertheless, they possess articulate abilities that can be used to express ideas concerning social relationships, family membership, and values that influence their views. Keeping these characteristics in mind, the following activities may prove fruitful.

1.) Observation and interpretation - Teacher collected pictures and photos of scenes from the community can be used by the teacher to train the students to observe, interpret, and discuss things that are familiar to the child.

2.) Prepare children to describe their family members and family history by asking specific basic questions; such as, where were you born, how long have you lived in your house, where were your brothers and sisters born, where were your mother and father born, where do your grandparents live, etc.?

3.) Prepare students for learning about time and the relativity of time. Ask students to describe the differences in age between classmates or family members, including the difference between being young and old. Have them identify the characteristics of people that are young, and people that are old, buildings that are young, and buildings that are old, etc.

4.) Prepare students to discuss and describe the difference between modern or "new" objects and primitive or "old" objects. General topics such as transportation and communication can be taught by visiting a museum or displaying new and old objects together for student

observation and discussion. This may also be done with photos. For instance, a picture of a new automobile can lead to most insightful comments.

5.) Occupation and change over time can be taught by assigning students the task of reporting on the occupation of their father and their grandfather. This comparison allows the student the opportunity to learn about community occupations and changes in occupation that have occurred in just one generation.

6.) Making a model community - Students can learn a great deal about local history by participating in the construction of a model community similar to theirs. This can be done through the use of large sheets of cardboard covered with butcher paper in which streets can be drawn; students can construct houses and buildings from milk cartons. Unlimited training opportunities for kindergarden children abound in such a project.

B. Primary Projects - Students in the first through third grades are busy acquiring reading and writing skills. Local history projects can be used as an appropriate media for developing these skills.

1.) Pictures and photos of people, places, and events can be used to teach about the local community.

2.) Stories about the development and growth of the local community are usually available from the library, local historical society, or chamber of commerce.

3.) Student-told stories about their family history in connection with coming to the community and working within the community are helpful in

developing some basic historical concepts and skills.

4.) Learning how to use the library, and locating material for use in learning about the community are important to students at this grade level.

5.) Making a scrapbook on the community of today and yesterday can be done as a class project.

6.) Family photo albums are often good sources for student projects connected with family histories.

7.) Field trips to outside libraries, museums and various community projects, are often good resources for specific types of class projects.

8.) Field trips to local farms, ranches, and industries can also be planned around classroom projects.

9.) Guest speakers from the community can help promote class projects.

10.) Students can construct murals depicting historical change in the growth and development of the community.

11.) Timelines can be used to teach students about the growth and development of the community.

12.) The uniqueness of the community can be displayed through student collected pictures according to various community themes.

C. Intermediate Projects - Intermediate students need experience in several of the basic investigative techniques involved in historical research. In addition, intermediate students should be able to work with more sophisticated social, economic, and political concepts associated with historical research.

1.) Community projects involved with library research can teach basic skills.

2.) Written projects that require a variety of resource materials including: encyclopedias, magazines, non-fictional literature, and

reference books can be used to explore local industry.

3.) Individual projects for students (rather than class projects that were stressed in the primary grades) including: maps and charts, scrapbooks, photo albums, posters, etc., expressing historical or community themes can be introduced.

4.) Community research involving outside resources such as museums, historical societies, public libraries, etc., should begin in the upper elementary grades.

5.) Introduction to questionnaires, surveys and interview techniques associated with local history can be part of individual or group work at this grade level.

6.) Projects involving city maps, city districts, zoning restrictions, and processes that bring community change teach students basic ideas about community growth and planning.

III. Suggested Projects for Secondary Teachers

While the suggestions listed in this section of the article are only a few of the possibilities that exist, these items may be helpful to the secondary teacher and student in getting projects started. This section is divided into three subsections which include ideas for local history projects, which could fit one or a combination of these types. Included in the three are projects that: are based on a specific type of source material; are concerned with current social problems; or, are related to the establishment, growth, and development of the community.

A. Projects based on a specific type of source material - While the topics vary from current issues which have historical roots to specific historical events, all of the research is based upon a specific type of

resource. The purpose of this type of research is to give the student experience with the resource material rather than an exhaustive type of research experience.

Specific Types of Resource Materials Include:

1.) Newspapers
2.) Pericdical Literature (magazines and journals)
3.) Reference Materials (encyclopedias, dictionaries, statistical sources, and other specialized sources of reference materials)
4.) Photographic Sources (aerial photos, historical photo collections, family photo albums, photos from various sources of periodic literature.)
5.) Monographic Literature (literature that contains a scholarly treatment of a specialized subject)
6.) Eyewitness accounts of historical events or epochs

B. Local history based upon current social issues - An important historical lesson for secondary students is to be able to associate current social issues with the historical evolution of the issue to its present condition of concern. Listed below are several very broad current social issues that could be used as the basis for this type of investigation.

Current Social Issues with Historical Research Potential:

1.) Pollution and the Environment
2.) Poverty
3.) Election Issues
4.) Education Issues (e.g. busing)
5.) Civil Rights
6.) Women's Rights
7.) Unemployment
8.) Drugs and Alcohol
9.) Family Life
10.) Technology and Automation

11.) Communication and Transportation
12.) Health Care
13.) Retirement and Old Age
14.) Crime and Justice
15.) Abortion and Population Growth
16.) Reverse Discrimination
17.) Right to Work Laws and Labor Unions
18.) Journalists Rights and Responsibilities
19.) Illegal Immigration
20.) Rights of Parents and Children in Divorce

C. Projects concerned with local events - Local events influenced the unique growth and development of most communities. While every community shares a common national heritage, it is the unique character of local community history that can provide research material for exciting research projects. Listed below are suggestions aimed at exploring the events that helped shape the unique nature of the local community.

Research Projects Related to the Growth and Development of the Local Community

1.) The Study of Local Historical Figures
2.) Early Pioneer Families in the Region
3.) Early Economic Base (or industry) of the Region
4.) Periods of Population Growth
5.) Unusual Local Events (catastrophies, discoveries, inventions, social events)
6.) The Establishment of Community Institutions (schools, theaters, libraries, banks)
7.) The Migration of Individuals, Families, or Groups into the Region
8.) Historical Epochs that Changed the Community (discovery of oil, technical advances, etc.) The social, economic, or political phenomenon which no longer exists

9.) The social history of minoriities and nationalities within the community

10.) Local figures who have influenced state and national affairs

IV. General Reference Sources For Teachers

Willa K. Baum, "Oral History for the Local Society," 2nd ed. (Nashville, Tennessee: American Association for State and Local History, 1971)

William Cutler, et. al., "Oral History as a Teaching Tool," The Oral History Review, 1973, 29-47

Philip D. Jordan, "The Nature and Practice of State and Local History," (1958) Publication Number 14 of The Service Center for Teachers of History, The American Historical Association (400 A Street, SE, Washington, D.C. 20003)

John A. Neuenschwander, "Oral History as a Teaching Approach," (Washington, D.C. NEA, 1976)

"Technical Leaflets," on a wide variety of specific aspects of local history, from The American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, Tennessee